



June 6, 2006

Reply to Attn of:

Office of Legislative Affairs
RV:leg:L/2006-00162

The Honorable Joseph Lieberman
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Lieberman:

NASA shares your concerns expressed in your letter regarding media reports alleging censorship and editing of NASA scientific findings by employees in the Office of Public Affairs. As noted in an e-mail to all Agency employees, while coordination and cooperation between our Public Affairs Officers and our scientific and engineering communities are vital, we will not tolerate any policy or action whereby Public Affairs Officers filter, alter, edit, or censor scientific findings and facts.

NASA has always been, is, and will continue to be committed to open scientific and technical inquiry and dialogue with the public. The basis for this principle is codified in the National Aeronautics and Space Act of 1958, which requires NASA to "provide for the widest practicable and appropriate dissemination of information concerning its activities and the results thereof." We will ensure that this practice continues in an environment that both promotes and encourages the free and open exchange of scientific and technical information in its appropriate context.

That said, however, an internal inquiry has revealed that one recent media request to interview Dr. James Hansen, of the Goddard Institute for Space Studies, was inappropriately declined. This action, which was contrary to NASA policy, did not spring from any change in policy or in any way change NASA's commitment to fully and transparently communicate its findings, programs, and activities to the public. In addition, several instances of inappropriate editing of scientific materials have been alleged. These allegations, if true, are unacceptable at NASA.

While the policies associated with media interviews and the release of public information are longstanding and are listed in 14 CFR 1213 (Enclosure 1), this matter has highlighted the need to clarify the Agency's policies and guidelines for coordinating public affairs activities within NASA, including interviews, press releases, or posted information on NASA Web sites. We have established a policy development group of NASA employees with science,

legal, and public affairs backgrounds to review existing policies and identify ways to improve them, and develop Agency practices to maintain our commitment for full and open discourse on scientific, technical, and safety issues. We welcome the opportunity to keep you and your colleagues informed as we develop this new policy.

NASA uses separate processes for the release of scientific and technical information to trade journals or professional society meetings. Per NASA Procedural Requirements 1080.1 (Enclosure 2), we encourage NASA and NASA-sponsored authors to publish widely in peer reviewed journals and to make oral presentations at professional society meetings. While release of this type of information does not require approval by the Office of Public Affairs, it does require a standard peer review process and other reviews within the Agency.

NASA has encouraged all employees to bring their concerns to management so we can work together to ensure that NASA's policies and procedures appropriately support our commitment to openness. Thank you for your commitment to the open communication of scientific results. We look forward to working with you on this important matter.

Sincerely,



Brian E. Chase
Assistant Administrator
Office of Legislative Affairs

2 Enclosures